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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development and implementation of the public input process at Gallaudet University's Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. It shows how the public input process was applied to one of the Clerc Center's priority areas, the transition from school to postsecondary education and employment. Part 1 of the paper describes the processes for eliciting public input to identify critical needs including meetings of representatives of various constituencies, ongoing analysis of questions frequently asked of teachers and staff, and in-depth interviews. Part 2 looks at the public input process as it was applied to the transition priority area, with results of this process presented in Part 3. These results indicate that transition programming should start early and be comprehensive and should include work-based learning, goal setting skills, self-advocacy skills, involvement of parents and family, and literacy development. The results also support the need to provide specialized training to professionals doing transition programming for deaf students in mainstream settings, to provide deaf role models, and to provide better transition planning within the Individualized Education Program. Part 4 describes the process of establishing national mission projects and how the public input process is sustained throughout the review and selection phases. (Contains 23 references.) (DB)

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ED 461 242

Sharing Results

How Public Input Shapes the Clerc Center's Priorities:

Identifying Critical Needs in Transition from School to Postsecondary Education and Employment

By
Judith M. LeNard, M.Ed.

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An Introduction to the *Sharing Results* Series

"Sharing Results" is a series of occasional papers that describe the results of work undertaken by the Clerc Center in its three priority areas of literacy, family involvement, and transition from school to postsecondary education and employment. The focus of each of these papers is determined through an extensive public input process with parents, educators, service providers, and researchers throughout the country. The Sharing Results series includes three kinds of papers:

1. descriptions of critical needs in the Clerc Center's priority areas and the processes used to identify those needs,
2. descriptions of the results of collaborations between the Clerc Center and other schools and programs to develop and implement innovative approaches to some of the persistent challenges of the Clerc Center priority areas, and
3. extensive descriptions of the evaluation of selected innovations to provide information to help program planners determine whether an innovation would be appropriate for their program.

It is hoped that the Sharing Results papers will provide valuable information and ideas to parents, educators, service providers, researchers, and others interested in the education of deaf and hard of hearing children.

Note: Copies of the Sharing Results papers can be ordered through the Clerc Center. To order printed copies of these documents, or for a complete listing of other Clerc Center publications, please contact:

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Judith M. LeNard, M.Ed., has worked at Gallaudet University for more than 30 years in a variety of positions, including teacher, administrator, and program evaluator. Currently she works in Exemplary Programs and Research, part of the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center. In her job as coordinator of transition projects, LeNard directs the Longitudinal Graduate Study and the development of TIPS, an instructional package for teaching planning and decision-making skills to deaf and hard of hearing high school students. She resides in Maryland with her husband, mother, and three barking dogs. LeNard welcomes comments about this publication: judith.lenard@gallaudet.edu.

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Any errors are my own.

Judy LeNard

Introduction

Gallaudet University's Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center (formerly known as Pre-College National Mission Programs) is charged by the United States Congress with developing, evaluating, and disseminating innovative curricula and materials and instructional techniques and strategies that can be used in various educational environments serving individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing throughout the nation. Within the broad spectrum of all deaf and hard of hearing students and their families, five groups have been identified as requiring special attention from the Clerc Center. These target populations are students who:

- are lower achieving academically,
- come from non-English speaking homes,
- have secondary disabilities,
- are from diverse cultures, or
- are from rural areas.

In carrying out its mandate for a national mission, the Clerc Center is required by Congress to "establish and publish priorities for research, development, and demonstration through a process that allows for public input" (Education of the Deaf Act Amendments of 1992). The process of collecting public input assures that the Clerc Center obtains information about needs and issues from the broad range of people and institutions it intends to serve.

The Clerc Center takes its responsibility for gathering public input very seriously. A systematic process to collect public input for the purpose of establishing priorities in research, development, and dissemination has been evolving since 1994. Public input is also solicited throughout the process of reviewing and selecting collaborative projects.

About this Paper

This paper has two important purposes:

- to describe the stages of development of the public input process, showing how each successive utilization of the process has informed and improved the scope and focus of the next application, and
- to demonstrate how the process was applied to one of the Clerc Center's three priority areas (the transition from school to postsecondary education and employment), and to share the results of this process, describing critical unmet needs identified in this priority area and the process for developing collaborations to address some of these needs.

Part I of the paper describes the processes for eliciting public input to identify critical needs. Part II looks at the public input process as it was applied to the transition priority area, with results of this process presented in Part III. Finally, Part IV describes the process of establishing national mission projects (collaborations based on the results of the input process) and how the public input process is sustained throughout the review and selection phases.

Part I: Collecting Public Input

In 1994, the Clerc Center invited 16 representatives from the various constituencies served by the Clerc Center to act in an advisory capacity to the vice president. These representatives, who later became known as the National Mission Advisory Panel (N-MAP), came from:

- center or residential schools for the deaf,
- day schools for the deaf,
- mainstream programs with deaf and hard of hearing students,
- regular elementary and secondary education programs,
- university programs,
- the deaf community,
- former students of Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (KDES) and the Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD), and
- parents of students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

At its initial meeting, N-MAP considered a large number of potential priorities for the Clerc Center's national mission, then narrowed the list to three:

- literacy for all,
- family involvement, and
- transition from school to postsecondary education and employment.

N-MAP identified these large priority areas, but it was the Clerc Center's responsibility to define and expand each area. The Clerc Center developed a process (called Partners for Progress) to include representation of all of its constituencies in the course of identifying critical unmet needs within each of the three priority areas.

Partners for Progress is the primary mechanism through which the Clerc Center identifies priorities for national mission activities in the three priority areas. In developing this mechanism, the Clerc Center has drawn on the experience and guidelines of the National Science Foundation Grant Proposal Process (1996), the National Science Board and National Science Foundation Staff Task Force on Merit Review Work (1996), the National Institutes of Health Grants and Contracts Process (1995), the U.S. Department of Education's Program Effectiveness Panel (1988) and System of Experts Panel (1997), and the Gallaudet Research Institute's selection and review process for priority research funding (Carol Traxler, personal communication, February, 1996). The purpose of Partners for Progress is to increase the impact of the Clerc Center's efforts in research, development, and dissemination by:

- identifying critical unmet needs within each of the three priority areas, and
- working collaboratively with programs and individuals to meet these needs.

To complete the initial step of identifying critical unmet needs, the Clerc Center employed many and varied sources of information through the strategies described below.

Strategies for Collecting Public Input

The Clerc Center gathered information from constituents using a number of different strategies over a period of several years. The first two strategies, Frequently Asked Questions and the Priority Feedback Project, began in 1996 and provided excellent background in each of the three priority areas and a base of information used in successive strategies.

Frequently Asked Questions. This first strategy collected information from the teachers and staff of KDES and MSSD, who receive a number of questions and comments—many from parents—through phone calls, letters, and visits to the schools requesting information about the education of students who are deaf or hard of hearing (DiPietro, 1997). Clerc Center teachers and staff compiled a list of questions most frequently asked by parents and educators from across the nation. The list was sorted into the three priority areas. Most of the questions in the area of transition were the "eternal" questions familiar to many professionals: Will my son go to college? What kinds of jobs do deaf people get? Will my daughter be able to get a scholarship to college? Will the school help my daughter get a job? What percent of graduates go to college? What will happen to my son if he can't go to college? These questions are at the root of transition planning for both parents and professionals working with deaf and hard of hearing youth.

Priority Feedback Project. The second source of public input also included all three priorities. The Priority Feedback Project conducted in 1996 was the first systematic endeavor to gather public input on the three priority areas for the Clerc Center's national mission (Hallau, 1997). Clerc Center teachers and staff were asked to identify individuals and programs throughout the nation that they felt contributed in important ways to the education of deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Seventy-six potential contacts were selected, representing identified constituencies. The following concepts guided the selection of the final list of potential contacts:

- Contacts should be in similar proportion to the number of deaf and hard of hearing students placed in specific programs.
- Two-thirds should be contacts from schools and programs serving deaf and hard of hearing students; the rest should include parents, individuals, and representatives of postsecondary programs, organizations, or agencies.
- Individuals who received multiple nominations should be included on the list of potential contacts.
- The various regions of the country should be represented, with as many different states participating as possible.

Twenty-one representatives of constituent groups, including public schools, schools for the deaf, parents, agencies, and postsecondary institutions, participated in in-depth telephone and TTY interviews. The interviewers asked three questions about each of the priority areas of literacy, family involvement, and transition from school to postsecondary education and employment:

1. What are the areas of greatest need?
2. What resources are needed that are not currently available?
3. What individuals or programs come to mind as important contributors in this priority area?

Of those individuals interviewed, approximately 50 percent represented public schools, 25 percent represented center schools, and the other 25 percent included parents, a service agency, and a postsecondary institution. Thirty-one additional contacts were attempted.

This first effort at collecting public input was a valuable learning experience for the Clerc Center. The phone and TTY interviews were an enlightening opportunity to talk with and get the perspectives of a variety of people. The contacts were very interested and impressed that the Clerc Center took the time to call them for feedback. The results of these interviews are summarized in the third section, "Results from the Public Input Process on Transition."

Based on their experiences, the contacts made suggestions for revising the process. Their suggestions included making the survey shorter by focusing on one priority at a time, or by first focusing on the expertise of the contact then, if he or she expresses an interest, exploring other areas.

The Clerc Center analyzed the problems with the 31 calls that could not be completed. About one-third reached wrong numbers or numbers that were not in service. Another one-third did not return calls after numerous attempts and/or messages had been left. The remaining calls reached respondents that were unable to schedule a convenient time to call back. This process for gathering public input, while yielding valuable information, proved to be time-consuming and labor-intensive.

This first systematic public input effort benefited the Clerc Center in several ways. In addition to the insights into critical needs in the three priority areas, the Priority Feedback Project provided guidance for future work on the process of public input. It also demonstrated the value of several important modifications:

- the need to target respondents with questions that clearly focus on their expertise and interests,
- the need to gather information through shorter and more focused surveys, and
- the need to gather information in a variety of formats.

The Priority Feedback Project also provided valuable contacts for future input and review efforts.

Stimulus Paper and the National Dialogue. When the Clerc Center chose family involvement as the first priority area for in-depth public input, additional strategies for gathering information were implemented. To identify the critical needs in family involvement, the Clerc Center sponsored a National Dialogue on Family Involvement (Pre-College National Mission Programs, 1996). This two-day meeting included 11 experts in early childhood education, parents of deaf and hard of hearing children, researchers, educators, and state project directors. As a part of their preparation, participants responded to a stimulus paper developed by two faculty members in the Gallaudet University Department of Education describing major premises in family involvement.[1] This stimulus paper was also sent to more than 60 people with interest in families of deaf and hard of hearing children and youth. Twenty-two individuals, including parents of

[1] This stimulus paper on family involvement has been revised and is currently available as a publication by Bodner-Johnson and Sass-Lehrer (1999) in the Clerc Center's *Sharing Ideas* series.

deaf children, administrators, teachers, and researchers, provided written feedback on each of the 16 premises in the stimulus paper.

The results of the National Dialogue and the feedback on the paper were synthesized with feedback from the 21 phone and TTY interviews from the Priority Feedback Project and findings from the most frequently asked questions, primarily questions from parents about the long-term future of their deaf and hard of hearing children.

All of the information gathered about family involvement through this process was synthesized and is currently being used for the Clerc Center's national mission projects and the programs in KDES and MSSD.

From the family involvement input process experience, the Clerc Center learned the power of these input strategies and how to modify them to make them more focused. The first National Dialogue showed the Clerc Center the effectiveness of giving experts time to freely interact face-to-face on critical issues. The more diverse the group, the better the dialogue. The task of writing responses to each premise in the concept paper proved a less satisfactory way to structure written input. Writing required considerable time on the part of the respondent and, because of overlap within the premises, was too open ended and sometimes confusing. A similar process was later used to identify critical needs in transition, but it was modified to keep the written responses more focused. An additional questionnaire that allowed respondents to provide input based on personal experiences without the need to first review the stimulus paper was also adopted as an input strategy.

Part II: Public Input Process for the Transition Priority Area

The Stimulus Paper on Transition Programming

The centerpiece of the process for gathering public input about the transition priority area was a paper written by two faculty members in the Gallaudet University Counseling Department, Dr. Marita Danek and Dr. Howard Busby (1997). The paper, *Concepts and Premises in Transition Planning and Programming: Empowerment Through Partnership,* explored the transition from high school to postsecondary life as a major challenge for most deaf and hard of hearing students. In describing transition, Danek and Busby note:

> Although predictable—and a challenge their hearing counterparts also face—the transition process…often involves leaving a relatively supportive special education system, complete with its complementary services and trained personnel, for the world of adult living and employment, which typically does not provide the same level of services and support. It involves letting go of the structured role of a student for the multiple and fluid roles of adulthood. (Danek & Busby, 1997, p.1; 1999, p. 1)[2]

Danek and Busby organized their stimulus paper around four issues that they identified as salient to the transition process for each deaf or hard of hearing student:

- educational issues,
- rehabilitation issues,
- environmental issues, and
- family issues.

In 17 premises on the role of the school, the counselor, the curriculum, the family, adult service programs, and employers, Danek and Busby laid out ideas for confronting major issues in transition programming. This well-informed, well-researched, and sometimes provocative paper was designed to stimulate thought and discussion about critical issues in transition. Excerpts provide insight into some of the issues:

> **Premise 1: Adoption of a philosophy that recognizes the leadership role of schools in the transition process will help ensure a seamless transition to adulthood for all deaf and hard of hearing youth.**
>
> Research in the past decade has portrayed a discouraging picture of the postschool experiences of young deaf and hard of hearing adults, including (a) high unemployment/underemployment rates, (b) low rates of full-time employment among those employed, and (c) low rates of participation in postsecondary education. Currently, large numbers of deaf and hard of hearing youth are receiving Supplemental Security

[2] This reference to Danek and Busby's paper has a double citation because the original paper, written in 1997, was used to collect public input. The paper was revised based on feedback to the authors gathered through the Clerc Center's public input process and published in 1999 as part of the Clerc Center's *Sharing Ideas* series. Citation of the more recent paper will be made in most cases; however, readers may note that some premises are numbered differently in the two papers.

Income (SSI) and are uninvolved in any productive activity (Bullis, Davis, Bull, & Johnson, 1997; Lam, 1994). (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 7)

Premise 6: Adoption of an interdisciplinary curriculum that is outcome-oriented will promote the acquisition of knowledge and skills that are important for productive and satisfying lives for deaf and hard of hearing students.

In the 21st century, our lives will become increasingly complex. If deaf youth are to access the social systems they need, become self-advocates, develop healthy lifestyles, and meet the demands of the workplace, they must learn basic skills for life: interpersonal, decision-making, and coping skills, in addition to learning about and trying out careers. (Danek & Busby, 1999, p.13)

Premise 18: An ecologically sound transition program includes peers as positive role models and mentors.

Peers can provide a safe and relevant vantage point from which to view the transition process. They can support, inform, encourage, confront, and communicate in ways that adults rarely can. They can model success, validate frustrations, combat isolation and demoralization, and provide direction when life appears riddled with stumbling blocks. (Lynch & Lynch, 1997) (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 28)

Danek and Busby's stimulus paper was used in a variety of ways to capture the opinions of professionals and parents concerned about the transition of deaf and hard of hearing students from high school into postsecondary education and employment. Other premises from Danek and Busby's 1997 paper will be employed to examine the information gathered through the public input process.

National Dialogue on Transition

The two-day National Dialogue on Transition, held at Gallaudet University on January 11 and 12, 1998, was a forum for discussing the issues and needs in transition programming for deaf and hard of hearing youth. Eleven experts in the field of transition were invited to discuss the challenges that face deaf and hard of hearing youth as they move from high school into postsecondary life. Groups represented at the National Dialogue included:

- parents,
- researchers,
- transition specialists,
- counselors,
- academicians,
- employers,
- teachers, and
- rehabilitation specialists.

Two-thirds of the participants worked with deaf and hard of hearing youth and young adults in various areas of transition programming and research. The rest represented expertise in the transition of students with other disabilities or students without disabilities.

While Danek and Busby's stimulus paper acted as a catalyst to focus participants' attention on some of the issues to be discussed, the major part of the National Dialogue focused on those needs in transition programming that were most critical and yet unmet. The discussion was vigorous and informative. Each participant was asked to name the two most critical unmet needs in transition programming and to explain the rationale for his or her choices. These results are discussed in the third section, "Results from the Public Input Process on Transition."

Questionnaires on Transition

Danek and Busby's stimulus paper on transition programming was also used to gather responses from a broader group of individuals interested in the transition of deaf and hard of hearing students. Two questionnaires and the stimulus paper were sent to 67 persons with experience and expertise in the field of transition. These individuals were nominated by professionals in the Clerc Center, Gallaudet faculty members, and the other transition experts previously contacted. One questionnaire asked for specific reactions to Danek and Busby's paper. The other questionnaire asked individuals to respond to the questions based on their own experiences. Some of the questions on this experience-based questionnaire included queries about the greatest challenge they had faced in working with deaf and hard of hearing adolescents, whether the transition needs of deaf and hard of hearing students differed from those of hearing students, and keys to successful transition programming. Fourteen individuals responded to both questionnaires. The low number of responses may have been a reflection on the time needed to complete the task and the time of year the questionnaires were distributed (between Thanksgiving and Christmas).

Recognizing that not all individuals would have the time or the inclination to read the stimulus paper and respond, the experience-based questionnaire was also distributed to an additional 75 persons within the same time frame. These names were selected specifically because they were parents and practitioners with current experience in working with deaf and hard of hearing adolescents, or young deaf adults, making the transition from high school to postsecondary life. Responses from all sources brought the total number of completed experience-based questionnaires to 40. The responses to this questionnaire were broadly based. Two-thirds of the respondents reported affiliations with public schools, and one-third indicated affiliation with center schools for the deaf. Parents, counselors, and rehabilitation staff members each represented 25 percent of the respondents in the sample. The last 25 percent was made up of researchers, social workers, and staff development professionals. The sample was evenly divided among small town, suburban, and rural respondents.

Wishing to increase the number of responses, Danek and Busby asked that their paper be sent to an additional 257 individuals. They identified these individuals from among their colleagues in the fields of transition, rehabilitation, and postsecondary education, both at Gallaudet and across the nation. The stimulus paper was sent to these individuals along with a letter from the Clerc Center asking for feedback on the three broad questions directly related to the paper. There were

41 responses, some several pages in length. These 41 responses, plus the 14 responses received from the first mailing in November and the discussion from the National Dialogue, were used by Danek and Busby to revise their paper. This revised paper was published in 1999 as a part of the Clerc Center's *Sharing Ideas* series. The revised paper incorporated a number of minor expansions and modifications to the original 17 premises, but the basic language and conceptual thrust remain the same. The major revision is the addition of a new premise (Premise 5 in the revised paper) emphasizing the importance of an appropriate education for non-college bound students:

> **Premise 5: Schools must recognize their responsibility to prepare non-college bound youth for the workforce or entry into appropriate technical-vocational training.**
>
> . . . the emphasis has been on a baccalaureate degree for all, or at least some, postsecondary training. . . . This philosophical bias, unfortunately, has not been advantageous for the large percentage of deaf and hard of hearing students who either do not enter postsecondary programs or who drop out without completing a postsecondary program (Lam, 1994). It encourages students and schools to enter into a type of magical thinking that says real life is years away and there are many years to acquire the skills of adulthood while continuing to be educated. Worse, it encourages schools to abrogate their leadership responsibility for the transition process. (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 12)

All of the responses to the public input strategies provided valuable information to the Clerc Center on the issues in transition. The stimulus paper and National Dialogue continue to be very potent processes for quickly collecting important information on the issues. The experience-based questionnaire added an important tool to the collection process. In the future, distribution will be shifted to more optimal time periods, and the format of the questionnaire will be modified to capture more precise demographic information. The practice of careful targeting of individuals with specific expertise and interest yields better information with less effort, and the process of using a variety of strategies to collect information ensures responses will represent a broad range of constituents.

Part III: Results from the Public Input Process on Transition

Background

All of the Clerc Center's sources of input, especially the National Dialogue and the questionnaires, contributed to a clearer understanding of the important issues and needs in the transition of deaf and hard of hearing youth from high school to postsecondary life. There emerged a sense of urgency at the individual level and, at the same time, a sense of the complexity of the systems involved in both problems and solutions. Danek and Busby's discussion of environmental issues provides a useful description of the complexity of transition as needs and solutions move from system to individual and back again.

> Environmental factors provide context for a successful school to work transition for deaf and hard of hearing youth. Environmental issues are those legislative, economic, attitudinal, and evaluative factors that impact on the effectiveness of transition programs in schools and adult service programs for deaf and hard of hearing students. Environments can be both immediate and distant. Family, school, peer group, adult programs, and workplace are inevitably imbedded in, and influenced by, conditions and events in the broader societal and cultural context. (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 24)

The competitive global nature of the marketplace is one of the primary systems that make transition so complex. The demands of the marketplace result in employers expecting ever more skills from the people they hire, which in turn spurs specific legislation affecting educational systems and other service providers. New legislation has had a dramatic effect on transition programming in the schools. In the introduction to their most recent book, *Beyond High School: Transition from School to Work* (1998), Frank Rusch and Janis Chadsey wrote:

> In 1992, we edited *Transition from School to Adult Life: Models, Linkages, and Policy*. This earlier text was a compilation of chapters that represented the 'state-of-the-art' at the time. . . . But much has changed since the publication of this earlier volume. In particular, new legislation has emerged that promises to reshape secondary education as we know it today. (p. xxiii)

Most familiar to educators of deaf and hard of hearing youth is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Public Law (PL) 105-17. This law is best known among special educators and parents as the law that introduced the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students with disabilities. It brought the parent and guardian into educational planning as a partner with educators. Reauthorizations of IDEA have steadily increased and clarified the role of transition planning for students with disabilities. The most significant change in IDEA relating to transition is the 1990 reauthorization:

> Traditionally, the IEP had been designated as a planning document for a maximum period of one year, focusing on annual goals that were broken into short-term objectives. With the addition of the transition services requirements in the IEP, planning for youth with disabilities took on a longer time period, with goals spanning several years. For the first

> time, therefore, educators at the high school level were being asked to orient their planning towards students' lives after secondary school, including statements of needed transition services, agency responsibilities, and linkages to services within other agencies. (Rusch & Chadsey, 1998, p. 65)

Other legislation passed in the mid-1990s "...reinforced the intent of the transition requirements under IDEA and were inclusive of all youth preparing for graduation and employment, or postsecondary training" (Rusch & Chadsey, 1998, p. 69). This legislation included the Job Training Reform Act of 1993 (PL 102-367); the National Service Trust Act of 1994 (PL 103-82); the School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) of 1994 (PL 103-239); and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994.

As a result of all this legislation, changes are expected in educational programs that directly affect students and their families. Employers and community representatives are now stakeholders in transition planning for secondary education outcomes. Students, including students with disabilities, will be exposed to work-based learning and curriculum changes that promote connecting school and work. For deaf and hard of hearing students, the link between school and adult service providers, specifically Vocational Rehabilitation programs, should be developed at 14, a much younger age than the usual practice of making the contact at age 17 or 18. The change that will have the most impact on the individual deaf or hard of hearing student is the expectation that each student will be an active participant in the process of developing his or her own IEP. Ideally, this shifts the role of advocacy from family to student. It is against this backdrop—dramatic changes in transition-related legislation and a rapidly changing economy demanding flexible and skilled workers—that the Clerc Center analyzed the public input on transition.

Analyzing the Results

The public input process on transition allowed the Clerc Center to hear vivid and authentic voices on the critical issues. The richness of the information gathered through open-ended questions and the National Dialogue more than made up for the challenge of interpreting the diverse responses. Multiple responses were given to single questions. Needs and solutions were often expressed as two sides of the same coin. For example, one respondent might state that the greatest need is that students don't know how to act appropriately in the workplace; another might suggest that the greatest need is giving students opportunities to learn appropriate job behaviors.

While respondents with differing perspectives expressed a variety of needs, the needs and suggestions for change mentioned most often were remarkably consistent from all sources of input. The needs identified in the following section on results have been selected in terms of frequency of response of an idea or a cluster of related ideas, as expressed by the broadest representation of constituents. The needs have also been organized by the level of intervention required to change the situation. For example, some unmet needs require system-wide changes; others lend themselves to change at the individual level.

An Ideal Solution

From all sources of input, the most compelling recommendation for transition programming is to start early and be comprehensive. The following is typical of a frequent response from participants in the National Dialogue: "I just cannot emphasize too heavily about starting early enough." From the Priority Feedback Project, one of the most frequent responses was, "Introduce the world of work early (elementary) and keep talking about it." Many respondents to the experience-based questionnaire answered the question about "key characteristics of effective programs" by advocating a developmentally based, infused curriculum. One response expanded the idea of what such a curriculum would include:

> The adoption of the developmental approach to career preparation in residential and day schools for deaf and hard of hearing students: 1) blends academic learning with work-force preparation, and 2) provides age-appropriate information and activities related to work throughout school years. . .. All students, hearing and deaf, would benefit from this curriculum.

The most compelling response came from the National Dialogue: six of the 11 participants listed a kindergarten through twelfth grade developmental curriculum that relates school to work as one of the two most critical needs. Ideally, this would be based on a career education model such as that described by Danek and Busby under Premise 3:

> This is a preventive, educational model that provides for student development, age-appropriate skills, and informed choice rather then clinical or intervention-based assistance. Most importantly, it serves not as an ancillary focus, but as an integral part of the overall school curriculum. This model also encourages extensive collaboration among teachers and counselors, thus integrating classroom concepts with developmental issues, including career and work-based learning. (1997, p. 7; 1999, p. 11)

In any program, implementing a process this long-term and complex is challenging, and in most public programs it would involve massive changes at the state or district level. As already mentioned, a number of legislative and curriculum efforts are underway to move in this direction. Unfortunately, these changes are neither consistent nor comprehensive. One respondent to Danek and Busby's paper stated it succinctly: "System-wide change is not a new idea but one that is very difficult to carry out." Meanwhile, a long-term, kindergarten through twelfth grade comprehensive developmental program will come too late for many deaf and hard of hearing students already in junior and senior high school. This is one of the sources of urgency frequently cited in the National Dialogue and from many respondents.

Critical Needs

Some of the major categories of needs and suggestions that follow are components or related parts of the comprehensive ideal curriculum. These smaller components, while not as effective by themselves as systemic change would be, offer the advantage that some can be implemented by an individual or group of individuals and can be advantageous for students still in school who have not had the benefit of early and comprehensive career education.

Work-based Learning. The cluster of learning experiences related to job skills and job readiness was mentioned twice as often as any other area of concern in the questionnaires and Priority Feedback Project, and was rated as a first or second critical need by three participants of the National Dialogue. Many comments from every source of input cited the need for appropriate job behavior, opportunities for work-based learning, work exploration, and work experience including volunteer and paid work, prior to graduation from high school. This statement from a National Dialogue participant exemplifies statements about the need for work-based learning:

> Unless they [deaf and hard of hearing youth] have opportunities for work-based learning, unless their curriculum integrates work-based learning with what they have learned in the classroom, and unless they have actually had paid work experiences, they will not be able to make the choices about what careers they want to pursue. They will not learn about what work expectations employers have. They will not be able to see the relevance between what they are learning in the classroom and what the real world requires.

Another respondent wrote, "Sadly the schools do not prepare students with real skills for the real world." A counselor said, "The greatest challenge is JOB READINESS, not in terms of job skills, but an understanding of appropriate job-related behavior—i.e., punctuality, social skills, rules of the workplace. Many of my clients have limited awareness of job culture at all and it is difficult to learn these skills."

One school-wide solution to this problem is to expose all students, including those on an academic track, to work and work-based learning. The School-to-Work Act of 1994 advocates work-based learning.

> The intent is for the workplace to be an environment in which youth will not only learn job-specific tasks for entry-level positions, but also acquire work-related skills including positive work habits, social and communication skills, and general knowledge of business operations. (Rusch & Chadsey, 1998, p. 54)

In a review of research on educational practices and outcomes, Phelps and Hanley-Maxwell (1997) found that certain educational practices are associated with positive learning outcomes for youth with disabilities. Further, they found that these educational practices and outcomes appear to align with at least two of the proposed components of reform in the national school-to-work movement: (a) integrating academic and vocational learning, and (b) providing expanded opportunities for work experience.

One of the reasons exposure to work and work-based learning is difficult to implement for all students is the long-held tradition that work experience and transition skills are only for students in vocational programs, not academic studies. For situations where there is no system-wide structure in place to provide the needed job readiness skills and real work experiences, respondents suggested job clubs, mentors, partnerships with employers, and volunteer opportunities as helpful strategies that could be carried out by a transition team or set up by an individual.

Goal setting. The single phrase most frequently used in the experience-based questionnaires was "realistic goals." Many respondents were frustrated because students did not have, or were unable to set, realistic goals. A whole set of skills underpins the ability to plan, set, and attain appropriate goals. *Responsibility*, *promptness*, *problem solving*, and *seeking help* were noted in the National Dialogue as some of those basic skills. One respondent noted, "Most deaf students do not have easy access to the incidental learning so necessary for work, leisure, and good health." Knowledge is empowering. Without access to the kind of information that comes to hearing students incidentally by overhearing conversations, announcements, television, and radio, deaf students exhibit gaps in knowledge and experience that must be explicitly addressed.

A second dynamic is equally harmful: deaf and hard of hearing students are often not given the same responsibilities and choices as their hearing peers. A number of respondents suggested providing students with more choices and opportunities to be independent at home and at school. The roots of dependency go deep. Problems in adolescence often stem from a younger age when the child with a hearing loss is encouraged to be dependent and passive. One respondent wrote, "I would change the system of promoting dependence and develop a process of teaching students decision-making skills, taking responsibility for their actions, and how to learn from mistakes." A climate of choice and responsibility is most effective in the early years, but pays dividends to the student at all ages. The ability to act independently and responsibly, and to make good choices, is empowering.

Self-advocacy. Responses from all sources of input agreed that self-advocacy skills are an everyday tool of survival for deaf and hard of hearing individuals. Much of the need for self-advocacy arises from the complexity of the systems deaf or hard of hearing adolescents encounter when they leave high school to become independent young adults. One respondent's remark captures the concern of many: "Deaf and hard of hearing students have many more agencies which they must deal with for transition than hearing peers do." As adults, deaf and hard of hearing individuals are often required to advocate for themselves to gain access to services and programs easily available to persons without a hearing loss. Knowing their rights and learning to advocate for their needs in school and in the workplace are basic transition requirements for deaf and hard of hearing youth. A quote from one of the parents who responded to the experience-based questionnaire emphasizes the need for self-advocacy skills in early postsecondary life: "Self-advocacy skills are so important. My daughter has such skills, but she got lost in the shuffle and didn't advocate the first couple of terms in college. When she started speaking out, the whole experience improved."

Like decision-making and goal-setting skills, self-advocacy skills do not just appear fully developed. Knowledge of rights is not the only requirement for self-advocacy. People have to develop the self-confidence to make their needs known and to assert their rights. Ideally, this ability to make choices and be independent is nourished over time throughout life. In their paper, Danek and Busby quote Don Schutt, a well-known transition expert, on self-advocacy:

> Student self-determination and self-advocacy should be the primary focus of transition services and the career development curriculum. These skills must be taught and supported by the school and parents from the earliest years. Schools must position students to live personally meaningful lives, [and] K-12 [should offer a] developmental

> progression of experiences that enhances decision-making skills and life options and provides opportunities to enrich and expand life experiences and challenges. (D. Schutt, personal communication, January, 1998) (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 9)

Students cannot make independent decisions, take responsibility for their actions, or advocate for themselves unless they feel empowered by their environment to do so. Although the ideal is to develop the basic skills that underlie both goal setting and self-advocacy from an early age, providing deaf and hard of hearing youth with opportunities for choice, responsibility, and independent decision-making at any age will enhance their skills for setting realistic goals and empower them to advocate for their own needs.

Parents and Family. Even though adolescence brings challenges to many families, families retain an important role in their children's lives. One participant in the National Dialogue made a strong case for the power of parents to affect changes, not only in their children, but also in systems that impact on their children. This respondent's remark represents the feelings of the many individuals who mentioned the need for parent involvement: "If you want a smooth transition, empower the family."

This same theme—the importance of strong parental involvement—was a central topic in the Clerc Center's earlier work on how to involve all families in their children's educational program and how families can help their deaf and hard of hearing children become full participants in family life. Partnerships with parents increase the power of education for a deaf or hard of hearing child.

The Clerc Center also learned that many parents and guardians of deaf and hard of hearing children do not get sufficient information about the options for their children; this situation is often worse in the adolescent years when transition issues are most important. IDEA states that students should be active participants in their own IEPs and learn to take control of their own transition plans. This is one of the most critical tasks for a deaf or hard of hearing adolescent as responsibility for assuming the role of advocate begins to shift from the parent or guardian to the adolescent.

Adolescence is a difficult time for many children and their parents, but the difficulty compounds in families with deaf and hard of hearing adolescents. "Alienation of deaf youth from parents can be exacerbated by distances from the school and communication barriers" (Danek & Busby, 1999, p. 17). One respondent said, "With parents who often cannot communicate effectively, work values are often not passed on from family to deaf child." High school is also a time when the school-family relationship is often weaker than at earlier ages. This is reflected in comments from parents that they have insufficient information about transition during this time. For all these reasons, the shift in responsibility for advocacy to the adolescent as described in IDEA is a normal, developmental task of adolescence, and one that is of heightened importance for deaf and hard of hearing youth and their families. In addition, schools and family may not always share the same goals for the adolescent, and that can create a sensitive situation that can place the adolescent in the middle of a conflict between school and family if transition planning is not handled carefully.

Literacy. Although the need to develop literacy skills was not specifically mentioned as often as other points, no discussion of the transition needs of deaf and hard of hearing adolescents is complete without mentioning this underlying problem. It is widely recognized that many deaf and hard of hearing students have poor skills in reading and writing. In commenting about the effects of low literacy skills, one respondent notes:

> The issue of language! The low (on average) reading and writing skills of deaf students is the real disability, not the actual hearing loss itself. Poor English skills affect all aspects of one's life: communication, employment, interaction, school, etc. Students may 'get by' for years in elementary/secondary school, then face a reality shock in college where they can no longer get by.

While some deaf and hard of hearing students exhibit literacy skills at or above grade level, the average achievement levels in reading comprehension for deaf and hard of hearing students are well below grade level. Information collected in 1996 by the Gallaudet Research Institute on the achievement levels in reading comprehension showed that the average 18-year-old profoundly deaf student in the survey was reading between third- and fourth-grade levels. Students with severe hearing loss averaged about a fourth-grade reading level. Students with less than severe hearing loss averaged just under a fifth-grade reading level. These results decline further when minority status is examined (Allen and Schoem, 1997). The issue of literacy skills appears time and again, regardless of the question. In the words of one participant in the National Dialogue, "We have to face the facts of the statistics." Literacy and family involvement underlie many of the issues involved in improving transition skills; any transition project that the Clerc Center undertakes must be aware of literacy and family involvement issues.

Special Needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Youth. With increasing numbers of deaf and hard of hearing youth in mainstream settings, transition programming for these students is being planned and implemented by educators who may not have special training in deaf education. Individuals who work with deaf and hard of hearing students hold a variety of views on the transition needs of these students. For example, depending on the training and experience of respondents, there were widely differing views about the question, "Do you think the transition needs of deaf and hard of hearing students differ from those of students with no hearing loss?"

All of the respondents with specialized training felt that deaf and hard of hearing students had special needs different from hearing students, even though the principles of transition and the developmental needs of the students are the same. Two responses typical of this perspective are:

> Yes. There are many aspects of career development that affect deaf students uniquely. . .. These issues need to be considered and addressed in a transition program designed for deaf people.

> . . . additional factors to take into consideration [are] isolation from the social world of the workplace, a stronger need to be assertive and self-advocate to get a job or advance, cultural pressures to accept SSI [Supplemental Security Income] or low-paying jobs in some cases, and more limited awareness, often, of different kinds of jobs or job opportunities.

There was a small number of respondents without specialized training who answered the question about the needs of deaf and hard of hearing youth in this way:

> No, the need for the information is the same for all students and their parents. In the case of deaf or hard of hearing students, only the modality of presentation is different.

As this response and frequent comments from all sources of input indicate, professionals without specialized training are often not fully informed about the needs of deaf and hard of hearing youth. This lack of information creates problems for deaf and hard of hearing students.

Staff with Specialized Training and Deaf Role Models. If deaf and hard of hearing youth bring special needs in transition, who should provide the needed curricula and services? The communication needs of deaf and hard of hearing youth are sometimes explicitly stated, but often only implied. As noted in the previous section, some respondents assume that all that is needed for these deaf and hard of hearing students is an interpreter. But this quote from one respondent reveals another perspective:

> I went through school alone without deaf support services. Isn't that wonderful? They do not see the other invisible disabilities of my ego in this bitty box, while everyone is applauding and giving scholarships and recognition, for not needing deaf services. That is an additional psychological pressure, and well-intended accolades from parents and people who do not realize that, you know, there is withering inside.

There is a need in all settings for teachers, counselors, transition specialists, and adult service providers who are trained to understand and work with deaf and hard of hearing youth. This is a serious need in many mainstream settings. One National Dialogue participant reported that the five school districts she represents asked her to come to the Dialogue and tell participants that: "We are going to need something pretty high up [to change]. The curriculum is packed, so we need some mandate to trickle down—to give the administrators who do not know anything about deafness a mandate, to give us time to pull in the specialists to teach the kids."

Mentioned just as often as the need for trained staff was the need for deaf role models. These comments are typical: "The students need role models also, they don't know what deaf people can do . . .." "EXPOSURE to successful, adult, deaf professionals!" "[Deaf staff in schools provide] exposure to a variety of deaf people who have experience addressing a range of issues the deaf student will encounter." Clearly, many people feel that deaf individuals can provide the mentoring and connections to the Deaf community that deaf adolescents need. The Deaf community was mentioned several times as a source of job placements.

At the National Dialogue, and in several of the questionnaire responses, the issue of specially trained staff was often linked to the need for more funding to hire additional trained staff. Staffing issues and funding to hire more trained and deaf staff are policy decisions, but providing opportunities for students to meet deaf adults and link with the Deaf community can be accomplished by a motivated teacher, counselor, or parent.

Transition Planning and the Individualized Education Program (IEP). As noted in the earlier section on legislation, the IEP is a primary mechanism for involving parents or guardians and students in transition planning at school. Surprisingly, there was only one comment from all sources of input that identified the IEP as an important tool in transition programming for students. The experience-based questionnaire asked respondents how transition planning was handled within IEP meetings they had attended. The responses were mixed, ranging from totally ineffective IEP experiences to totally satisfactory ones. The majority of responses indicated some problems at the meeting or in the follow-up.

Summary of the Public Input Results. The classroom needs to become more relevant to the real world. All deaf and hard of hearing students need exposure to jobs, the workplace, and deaf role models. They need more opportunities to make their own choices and to be held accountable. Parents need more information about ways to be involved with their sons' and daughters' transitions. All these transition-programming issues require improved communication and cooperation among stakeholders, especially the student and his or her family. All deaf and hard of hearing students—whether in a residential school, a day program, or a mainstream setting—have unique transition needs that must be recognized by all the individuals and agencies helping them. Specialized training in working with deaf and hard of hearing students and deaf adults is needed in all settings.

Many of the transition problems and solutions discussed in this paper require curriculum changes at state or district levels, public policy changes, or more funding to hire trained deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing staff. These issues need long-term solutions. Advocacy for curriculum, policy, and funding changes by parents, the Deaf community, and others can be effective. Some needs identified were at the school or classroom level, and some can be changed at the individual level.

Part IV: Putting Public Input to Work

Request for Collaboration

Collecting public input on critical unmet needs is not an end in itself. The purpose is to guide the Clerc Center's research, development, and dissemination. To accomplish this objective, Partners for Progress works collaboratively with programs and individuals to develop projects that impact unmet needs. Information about these projects is disseminated in a Request for Collaboration (RFC) that invites programs to collaborate with the Clerc Center. The Clerc Center uses the following criteria for identifying projects for collaboration. They must:

- be responsive to needs identified in the public input process;
- be applicable to all educational settings;
- supplement, not duplicate, other ongoing work;
- focus on target groups as much as possible; and
- lead to an impact.

The RFC process within Partners for Progress is most appropriate for projects directed to the school, classroom, or individual.

Of particular importance to the Clerc Center's national mission is identifying "best practices" in the area of transition. To avoid duplication, the Clerc Center reviewed other national projects. Since there were already two ongoing projects investigating "best practices" in the education of deaf and hard of hearing students, it was decided not to develop any project that would overlap with them.

As part of the public input process, the Clerc Center shared the information gathered on transition with the National Mission Advisory Panel (N-MAP). The presentation focused most closely on student needs. The feedback from N-MAP indicated that the picture described by the public input was reflective of what they had experienced in their programs. One N-MAP participant stressed that what schools and programs would find helpful is information about how well they are preparing students for life after graduation and tools to help schools evaluate their programs. This idea resonated with responses from the Priority Feedback Project and Danek and Busby's stimulus paper. Follow-up research on graduates is needed to find out how well they are doing in postsecondary life. An internal survey at MSSD also identified the need for information from graduates to use as a potential tool to guide program change.

In response to this feedback on student and program evaluation needs, the Clerc Center developed two related projects based on the real-life experiences of recent graduates who are deaf and hard of hearing. First, a research study was developed that seeks to better understand transition from the perspectives of deaf and hard of hearing graduates. This study also explores graduate follow-up as a possible tool to use in program evaluation and a guide for curriculum change.

To address the concern that students are not prepared to make decisions, set realistic goals, or advocate for themselves, a second project is directed at students in high school classrooms. This

is an instructional package for teachers who will work with small groups to enhance self-determination by teaching planning and decision-making skills.

Both projects derive from the needs described in the public input process as well as the needs found at KDES and MSSD. Both projects are applicable to all educational settings, including the Clerc Center's target groups, and are designed to directly impact critical needs identified in transition.

Transition Collaborations

Selecting Collaborators. To select collaborators for these projects, the Clerc Center undertook the application, review, and selection phase of the Partners for Progress process. As a first step, the Clerc Center wrote a RFC that described the two projects in depth. The RFC included an application form and criteria for a proposal. These same criteria were used in the review and selection process. A key criterion was inclusion of one or more of the Clerc Center's five special target populations: students who are lower achieving academically, who come from non-English speaking homes, who have secondary disabilities, who are from diverse cultures, or who are from rural areas.

In an effort to reach those parties whose applications would be eligible, a flier that briefly described the two projects (with a return request for an application) was sent to 2,110 individuals and programs serving deaf and hard of hearing students and their families. In addition, the Clerc Center mailed the RFC directly to all individuals who expressed an interest in transition on a general flier about family involvement that was distributed earlier. Applications were also distributed through the Gallaudet University Regional Centers.

The Clerc Center received 15 applications, about equally divided between center schools and mainstream schools. Extending public input to the review and selection process, the Clerc Center asked four external reviewers to serve on an External Review Committee. To maintain continuity, a member of the National Dialogue was named one of the reviewers. Transition specialists, a researcher, a parent, and a member of the Deaf community were represented in the group. The External Review Committee reviewed the applications individually. Based on feedback from the committee that reviewed the family involvement RFCs earlier, members of the transition External Review Committee met for one day to discuss their individual recommendations and to develop group recommendations. This modification of the external review process proved very satisfactory, as reported by the committee members. The transition committee also recommended future changes to improve the review process, including giving more time for individual reviews and standardizing the application format for easier reading. The external group's recommendations on the 15 applications went to the Clerc Center's vice president's team for an internal review. Based on the recommendations of the external and internal review groups, the vice president made the final selections: the Illinois School for the Deaf in Jacksonville, Illinois, and South Hills High School in West Covina, California.

Implementing the Collaborations. The Longitudinal Graduate Study (LGS) is a three-year follow-up of selected samples of recent graduates of MSSD, the Illinois School for the Deaf, and South Hills High School. It is a qualitative research study to explore the question, "What is

transition from high school to postsecondary life from the graduate's perspective?" The study uses in-depth, face-to-face interviews to ask the graduates to tell their stories about school, work, and life experiences they've had since graduation. It also asks graduates to compare their lives at school before graduation with their lives after graduation. The purpose of the study is threefold:

- to provide information to the collaborating programs about the effectiveness of their own transition programs,
- to provide the Clerc Center with information about the value of the process as a program evaluation tool and its transportability, and
- to explore common themes or patterns that define the early postsecondary experience for deaf and hard of hearing young adults.

To provide continuity of the public input process, a participant from the National Dialogue is a member of the group that is analyzing the LGS interviews from MSSD.

The Transition Instruction Package for Students (TIPS) is being pilot-tested in 2001 as an instructional package for high school-aged deaf and hard of hearing students. The package includes an instructional guide for the teacher or facilitator and videotapes that capture the real-life experiences of recent graduates of MSSD, the Illinois School for the Deaf, and South Hills High School. TIPS is intended to increase students' self-determination. The materials focus on the decision-making process and the tapes will be used as a stimulus for discussion, critical thinking, and conceptual applications. In structuring the classroom instruction, TIPS emphasizes choice and responsibility. It also uses a multiple-intelligence framework in constructing assessment of performance so that students learn alternate ways of expressing themselves and explore their own particular interests and strengths. To continue to provide continuity in the public input process, a member from the National Dialogue is one of five members in a TIPS External Advisory Group.

Summary

The Public Input Process

The Clerc Center has been charged by the Congress of the United States "to establish and publish priorities for research, development, and demonstration through a process that allows public input" (Education of the Deaf Act Amendments of 1992). Since 1994, the Clerc Center has devoted significant resources toward developing and implementing a structured process for gathering public input, starting with the establishment of the National Mission Advisory Panel (N-MAP), whose membership represents the constituencies served by the Clerc Center. The constituencies include center and residential schools for the deaf, day schools for the deaf, mainstream programs with deaf and hard of hearing students, regular elementary and secondary education programs, university programs, members of the Deaf community, former students of Kendall Demonstration Elementary School (KDES) and the Model Secondary School for the Deaf (MSSD), and parents of deaf and hard of hearing students. Sixteen constituency representatives were selected to act in an advisory capacity to the vice president. N-MAP narrowed the priority areas to three: literacy for all, family involvement, and transition from school to postsecondary education and employment. The Clerc Center has the responsibility to define and expand each of these priorities.

The Clerc Center developed Partners for Progress, a mechanism through which it identifies widely accepted critical needs in each of the three priority areas and identifies collaborating programs and individuals to make an impact on these needs. Each time the process is used, it is assessed, modified, and expanded.

Throughout the public input process, the Clerc Center makes a significant effort to assure the broadest representation among the constituent groups that serve or advocate for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. The Clerc Center has used a variety of strategies to obtain public input from the constituent groups. They are:

- N-MAP — This committee is composed of representatives from the Clerc Center's constituency groups and was established to advise the Clerc Center's vice president in carrying out the Education of the Deaf Act's national mission responsibilities.
- Frequently Asked Questions — This document is a compilation of those questions most frequently asked of the Clerc Center staff by parents and educators.
- Priority Feedback Project — This project includes in-depth phone and TTY interviews with representative constituents about needs in the three priority areas.
- Stimulus Paper — This is a comprehensive paper on each of the priority areas based on research and current practice that has been developed by experts to stimulate thought and discussion in the public input process.
- National Dialogue — This meeting is composed of transition experts and parents who gather to discuss the issues and critical unmet needs in one of the priority areas.
- Questionnaire Surveys — Printed questionnaires are structured to elicit opinions and comments from parents, educators, researchers, vocational rehabilitation and personal counselors, administrators, and others.

The stimulus papers for each priority area have been found to be valuable tools for stimulating thought and discussion about current issues, especially when used in conjunction with the National Dialogue. Of the other public input strategies the Clerc Center has used, N-MAP, the Priority Feedback Project, and the experience-based questionnaire surveys have provided the most useful information about current needs of parents and practitioners in the field. The power of the public input process is magnified by using a variety of strategies to collect information that identifies needs appearing across constituency groups. Information from one source validates findings from other groups.

Meeting Critical Needs in the Transition from School to Work

With a backdrop of dramatic change in transition-related legislation impacting schools and a complex competitive marketplace, the Clerc Center used the public input strategies to identify and develop a clearer understanding of needs in the area of transition for deaf and hard of hearing students. Critical needs were defined as those needs expressed most frequently by the broadest constituency. Ideally, transition skills should be taught through a developmental, comprehensive curriculum that relates school to work and provides opportunities for work-based learning. A number of efforts seek legislative and curriculum change, but these long-term solutions are difficult to implement.

The long-term developmental approach to transition programming does not help the many students currently in junior high or high school. The Clerc Center found a number of areas that were identified by many sources as important unmet needs in the area of transition programming for deaf and hard of hearing youth:

Student Needs:

- Opportunities for work-based learning, exposure to work, and for paid and volunteer work
- Opportunities to learn explicitly what they have missed, especially in the areas of skills that underlie decision-making and goal-setting
- Opportunities to make age-appropriate choices and assume responsibilities from the earliest age
- Opportunities to learn his or her rights and needs as a deaf or hard of hearing individual and learn how to advocate for him- or herself
- Opportunities to work with staff that have the communication skills and other specialized training to meet his or her transition needs
- Opportunities for exposure to deaf and hard of hearing role models and contact with the Deaf community
- Opportunities for improving literacy skills in transition-related programs

School and School System Needs:

- Developmental, comprehensive curriculum starting in kindergarten that relates school to work and offers work-based learning and opportunities for volunteer and paid work
- Classrooms and school policy that incorporate independence and choice into the everyday curriculum for deaf and hard of hearing youth

- More and better information and training for staff and administrators responsible for the transition programming of deaf and hard of hearing students
- More trained staff to work with deaf and hard of hearing youth
- More qualified deaf and hard of hearing staff to work with deaf and hard of hearing youth in a variety of capacities
- Connection with the Deaf community
- More information and opportunities for developmental tasks

Parent Needs:

- More information about transition programming as it applies to their son or daughter
- More information about the rights of deaf and hard of hearing students and adults and about services available
- More opportunities to be involved with the school
- More information about incorporating independence and choice into their parenting

The Clerc Center used the results from the public input process to develop two projects:

1. an instructional package for students to enhance self-determination through decision-making skills, and
2. a longitudinal graduate study to understand the transition from high school to postsecondary life from the graduate's perspective and to explore a new evaluation tool for transition programs.

Collaborators were selected in a competitive review and selection process that expanded the public input process by including external reviewers. The Illinois School for the Deaf and South Hills High School were selected to work with MSSD. These three-year projects were in their first full year of implementation in 2001.

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